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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 002892

SIPDIS

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EUR/WE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SU](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: SUDAN: SANT'EGIDIO OFFERS ROME MEDIATION VENUE
FOR DARFUR PEACE TALKS

Classified By: Ambassador James Nicholson. Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY and ACTION REQUEST: The Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community, which specializes in conflict mediation and has ties with both the Sudanese government and main rebel groups, conveyed its interest in hosting informal discussions at its Rome-based headquarters to establish a political dialogue aimed at bringing about a resolution of the ongoing conflict in Darfur. Sant'Egidio believes Rome could offer a neutral venue acceptable to all the parties. The Community's representatives at recent Addis Ababa talks had mentioned this offer informally to U.S. officials, but wanted to make a more formal offer to the parties involved if such a step would in principle be acceptable to the U.S. If the U.S. would be amenable to Rome as a venue, Sant'Egidio would welcome U.S. support to secure the participation of the government and opposition groups. Sant'Egidio maintains excellent ties with the African Union, and would also work to ensure their involvement should discussions eventually take place in Rome. (See Action Request para. 7.) End Summary.

12. (C) Sant'Egidio Community representative Mario Giro contacted DCM July 23 to reiterate the Community's interest in offering a venue for discussions between the Sudanese government and rebel groups aimed at establishing a genuine political dialogue and defusing the situation in Darfur. Giro noted that he had conveyed this offer informally to U.S. officials at the recent African Union-sponsored talks in Addis Ababa, but wanted to pursue it further. Before discussing this further with the parties to the conflict, Sant'Egidio wanted to secure U.S. support in principle.

13. (C) Sant'Egidio has well-developed contacts with both the Sudanese government and the major rebel groups in Darfur, and, according to Giro, is trusted by all sides. The SLA's (Sudanese Liberation Army) leader has been to Rome three times in recent months for meetings with Sant'Egidio, and Sant'Egidio has met with JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) leaders in Paris in February. Giro also met the Sudanese President and Vice Foreign Minister during his recent visit to the region. Giro understood that the rebel groups had reservations about continuing discussions to facilitate their travel), preferring Geneva, where they had close links to the Human Dialogue Center. The government, however, would likely be reluctant to go to Geneva, which they would see as a venue favoring the rebel groups. For these reasons, Giro believed Sant'Egidio's Rome headquarters could offer a neutral venue out of the limelight for discussions on Darfur.

14. (C) Giro observed that if the international community agrees on the need for a political dialogue on Darfur, it would be necessary to find a better venue than Addis Ababa, and a better mediator than the African Union (AU). Sant'Egidio was prepared to offer their headquarters -- the site of the successful mediation of the Mozambique civil war and other African conflicts -- and their services as mediator to both the government and rebels. Before doing so, however, Sant'Egidio wanted to vet their proposal with the U.S. Specifically, Giro asked whether this proposal would be acceptable in principle to the U.S. and solicited U.S. views on the benefits of a genuine political dialogue. If the U.S. reaction is positive, Sant'Egidio would look to the U.S. to convey to the parties our support for such a dialogue in Rome.

15. (C) Giro emphasized that Sant'Egidio, which is concluding an arrangement for observer status with the African Union, was sensitive to the need to incorporate the AU into any dialogue. Giro said the Community's relations with the AU were such that they could finesse AU participation without offending the organization, and would also ensure the AU's involvement in a way agreeable to all the parties.

16. (C) As to the content of such talks, Giro suggested that the first meetings, which would be confidential, would likely aim at establishing an agenda. Once an agenda was established, the meetings could be expanded to include observers, including the AU. Giro noted that he understood some were skeptical of a political dialogue, preferring to focus simply on a cease-fire and a humanitarian dialogue.

The risk with this approach, he believed, was that the underlying problems could easily resurface again, or could have negative influence on the peace talks in Kenya or spillover effects on stability in Chad.

17. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Embassy requests Department review Sant' Egidio's offer to host confidential discussions between the Sudanese government and rebel groups and advise Embassy of reservations/support for this proposal to convey to Sant'

Egidio's senior representatives in Rome. As noted above, Sant' Egidio has a long and distinguished history of conflict mediation, particularly in Africa, where they worked closely with the U.S to end the Mozambican civil war, and have recently been engaged in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Sudan.

Nicholson

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